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# **A Seder of the Sisters of Sarah**

Created by  
Ronnie Levin and Diann Neu



## **A Holy Thursday and Passover Feminist Liturgy**

February, 1986  
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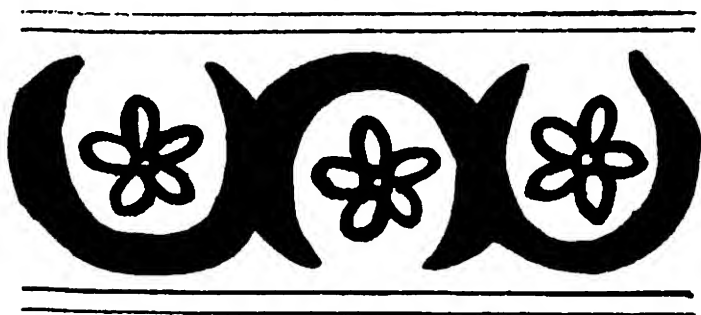
A Resource from Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics & Ritual

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Feminist Liturgies celebrated by Women Church base communities, Jewish women's groups, and Christian and Jewish circles are emerging in a visible way. In Christian groups, Holy Thursday has traditionally been a time to celebrate a Passover Meal. Christian feminists gather to celebrate Holy Thursday telling the story of women's journey from oppression to liberation. In Jewish tradition, Passover is the holiday of spiritual freedom and national identity from which Jewish feminists have taken powerful symbols and sources of inspiration.

"A Seder of the Sisters of Sarah" is a resource which includes the script for a Passover Meal that is celebrated from a feminist perspective. It was celebrated by Jewish and Christian, post-Christian and post-Jewish women of WATER.

We, the women of WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual, offer this resource to nourish feminist liturgical celebrations, to encourage women's base communities to reclaim symbols for women's spirituality, and to invite all churches and synagogues to incorporate feminist perspectives into worship.



## Preparation

This is a pot luck meal. *Invite* participants to bring their favorite food. *Gather* a Seder plate for each table. This can be as simple as a large, colorful paper plate with five plastic glasses to fit on it, or, if you have one, a Seder plate manufactured for the purpose. Fill one glass or section with a roasted shankbone (chicken neck will do), one with a roasted egg, another with bitter herbs (horseradish), another with haroset (chopped apple and nuts flavored with wine and cinnamon) and the last with karpas (parsley, greens, celery). *Place* on each table the Seder plate, a small plate with three matzahs, a cup of salt water, a cup of wine for Elijah, 2 candles, carafes of wine and juice, a bowl of water and a towel. Color coordinate table cloths, napkins, plates and candles, if possible. Spring green is a lovely color for this celebration. *Set* the tables with a place setting for each person.



*Provide* a copy of this service for each participant. Ordinarily we do not suggest this, but this service is long and detailed and people will want their own copy. **PLEASE DO NOT XEROX** this copy as it is copyrighted.

*Enlist* leaders for each of the sections in the service. You will need leaders for the fourteen parts of the service, as well as readers. The questions are best asked by children.

**NOTE:** This service is long, about one hour before the meal comes. You may want to have an hors d'oeuvre table ready as guests arrive.

## Introductions

Begin the liturgy by introducing yourself saying why you have come. Spend a few moments going around the circle (or tables if the group is large), letting each person tell her/his name and why she/he has come.



## Music Practice and Instructions

*(The musicians teach the songs if they are new. Give simple instructions that your group will need for the celebration.)*

## Centering

Welcome to our Holy Thursday/Passover celebration: "A Seder of the Sisters of Sarah." Tonight is Holy Thursday in the Christian calendar; a few nights from now is Passover in the Jewish calendar.

Tonight we reclaim the symbols of our Jewish and Christian heritages from a feminist perspective and from women's experience. For both traditions, this feast is a celebration of freedom and a commemoration of the struggles and sufferings of many.

We gather as Jewish and Christian women to commemorate the struggles and sufferings, the freedom and new birth of women's lives.

## Jewish Introduction

**SHALOM**, and welcome to our Passover seder. Passover is a delicious combination of spring rite, freedom festival, and shared meal. The pattern of our celebration is a mixing of the bitter and the sweet, of joy and sadness, of hope and struggle.

On each table is a seder plate, containing 5 symbols of Passover. As we mention each one, a different woman at each table will lift it up.

- a roasted shankbone* (commemorating the Passover offering);
- a roasted egg* (an enigmatic symbol of both life and death: spring fertility and the animal sacrifice in the Temple);
- maror* (ma - rōr') or bitter herbs (representing the embittered existence of slaves);
- haroset* (ha - rō' - set), a mixture of chopped fruits and nuts, flavored with wine and spices (resembling the mortar used for bricks); and
- karpas* (kar - pas'), a green vegetable (as a symbol of spring).

In addition, each table also has a plate with 3 *matzahs*; a cup of salt water to symbolize our tears; a cup for Elijah; 2 candles; and lots of wine and juice.

*Seder* (sāy' - der) means "order," and our Seder tonight follows the traditional structure, including all of the traditional elements and symbols. Our *haggadah* (ha - ga' - dah, the script for this celebration), however, reflects a fuller history of the Jewish people than does the traditional one.

We will sing the Seder-order before each new part of the service.

- Kadesh* (blessing over the first cup of wine)
- Urechatz* (first washing of hands)
- Karpas* (dipping the green vegetables into salt water)
- Yachatz* (breaking the middle matzah)
- Magid* (telling the story)
- Rachatz* (second washing of hands)
- Motzi Matzah* (blessing over eating the matzah)
- Maror* (eating the bitter herbs)
- Korech* (sandwich of matzah, maror, and haroset)
- Shulchan Orech* (eating the meal)
- Tzafoon* (eating the afikomen)
- Barech* (grace after meals)
- Hallel* (reciting the psalms of praise)
- Nirtzah* (closing portion of Seder)

## Christian Introduction

Holy Thursday is a time when we proclaim ourselves church and recognize our ministry. Traditionally, it is a time when the men of the Catholic Church celebrate their exclusive priesthood. Tonight, we reclaim Holy Thursday by remembering its roots: the Last Supper celebrated on this night is believed to have been a Passover Seder.

In recounting women's stories of oppression, struggle, and liberation, we remember the role of women in the Seders. Tonight, we recognize women's priestly ministry—our leadership in house churches, in Eucharist and sacraments, in healing, in decision-making. . . . We celebrate this night as Jewish and Christian feminists together. Let our prayers and our feast begin!

**Song:** "Coming Out of Exile" by Carolyn McDade

We are comin' out of exile, comin' home.  
We are comin' out of exile, comin' home.  
We are comin' out of exile, comin' out of exile,  
We are comin' out of exile, comin' home.

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## Kindling the Lights

Jewish holidays are ushered in with the kindling of lights, and many Christian celebrations begin by lighting candles, as well. Tonight, before we light the festival candles, we hear the words of Hannah Senesh, a daughter of the Exodus, a Jewish freedom fighter who was captured and executed by the Nazis in 1944. While in prison, she wrote:

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

Blessed is the flame that burns  
in the secret fastness of the heart.

Blessed is the heart with strength to stop  
its beating for honor's sake.

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

*Hannah Senesh*

Let us, as Jewish and Christian women together, light the candles that guide us on our way toward liberation.

*One woman at each table lights the candles. (Lights are dimmed.)*



**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Kadesh** (*ka - desh'*, blessing over the first cup of wine)  
*Pour wine into your glasses.*

This first of 4 glasses of wine is dedicated to all of our foremothers, those whose names survived for our recall and those whose names were lost to us. To Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Jael, Deborah, Judith, Tamar, Mary, Elizabeth, Mary of Magdala, Junia, Priscilla, Myrta, Nympha, Thecla, mystics, witches, martyrs, heretics, saints, uppity women, slaves, poor immigrants, old hags, wise women, our mothers and grandmothers.

In the spirit of our power together we bless this first cup.

**ALL:** **Blessed are you, Holy One, who created the fruit of the vine. It is a sign of joy and feasting. Tonight we drink it in memory of all the women who have worked for liberation. May it gladden our hearts and strengthen us as their sisters. Amen.**



**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Rechatz** (*ra - chotz'*, washing of hands)

We wash our hands to prepare ourselves for this meal. We wash away the old and prepare ourselves for the new. We wash our hands as a symbol of women's work—doing dishes, doing justice, cleansing ourselves and our world of all that oppresses, all that limits, all that stands in the way of full personhood.

*Dip your hands into the bowl of water and then dry each other's hands.*

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Karpas** (*kar - pas'*, dipping the green vegetables into salt water)

We dip the spring fruits of the earth into salt water to celebrate the thawing, the return of warmth, and the reawakening of the earth. Salt water symbolizes the tears we shed when we were slaves in Egypt. It symbolizes the tears we shed for our oppression as women, as blacks, Hispanics, lesbians, divorced, mothers. . . . We celebrate the pain and struggle, the growth and new life of women's lives.

**ALL:** **Blessed are you, Holy One, who brings forth green plants from the earth. They are the symbol of Spring, and signs of hope in our struggle against oppression. May they give us strength and vitality to bring about liberation.**

*Take a piece of parsley. Dip the greens in salt water and eat.*

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Yachatz** (*ya - chotz'*, breaking the middle matzah)

One half of the broken matzah will become the *afikomen* (*ah - fee - kö' - men*) that we will eat at the end of the meal. The broken matzah represents the distorted reality in which we as women live. We have been expected to conform to the male order of society; when we reject these limits, we become outcasts. Yachatz is the break with that slavery and the search for our new identities.

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Magid** (*ma - geed'*, telling the story)

*One woman from each table holds up a piece of matzah.*

Behold the matzah of affliction which our foresisters baked in the land of Egypt. Let it remind us of people everywhere who are poor and hungry. Let it remind us of women today who are enslaved. Let us listen to the words of Julia Esquivel, Guatemalan exile and poet, transforming our prayer.





Give us this day our daily bread

the bread of the freedom to associate and organize,  
the bread of being able to be at home and walk the streets  
without being abducted,  
the bread of not having to search for a place in which to hide,  
the bread of going into the streets  
without seeing machine guns,  
the bread of equality,  
the bread of happiness.

Let the bread of your word and the bread of education  
come into our huts made of cane stalks and straw,  
into our cardboard shacks, and let us carry them  
in our knapsacks as we travel through life.



The bread of land titles for all campesinos,  
the bread of milk for all children under 2 years of age  
who suffer malnutrition and hunger,  
the bread of medical assistance  
for those in the countryside,  
the bread of land for the thousands of landless campesinos. . . .

*Julia Esquivel, "The Lord's Prayer From Guatemala,"*

**Threatened with Resurrection**

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#### **Four Questions (Asked by four different children)**

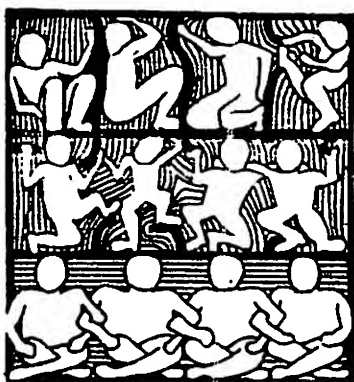
1. Mother, why is this night different from all other nights? Why do we celebrate a women's Seder?
2. Mother, why do we taste this bitterness and keep it fresh in our mouths?
3. Mother, why then do we taste both salt tears and sweet?
4. Mother, why do we find it so difficult to lean back and relax during this meal?

**Mothers answer.** (*Answered by four different mothers*)

Tonight we have gathered our foremothers to our table, to surround our telling of the story with their reflections on the Pass-over story.

**Sarah:** I am Sarah, a mother of faith. In my flesh, I established the covenant between God and Abraham. I am the symbol of the covenant. My gift of life to Isaac fulfilled God's blessing to me and to Abraham: the covenant that a people "as numerous as the stars in the heavens" would follow. Women's bodies, through our cycles of birth and rebirth, are the guarantors of God's promise of perpetuity.

**Mary of Magdala:** I am Mary of Magdala, a witness to Christ's resurrection and the foundation of women church. I am the apostle to the apostles and yet I am rejected, forgotten, and proclaimed a whore in male written stories. I received the same promise as Peter. Tonight, may we believe in our promise as women and commit ourselves to telling our stories accurately.



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**Sojourner Truth:** I am Sojourner Truth, an abolitionist born a slave in New York State. When I was finally freed, I used my freedom to preach against slavery and for a revival of religion; ain't I a woman? May we all treasure our freedom by working that all women everywhere and at all times may be free.

**Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo:** We are Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo from Buenos Aires, Argentina. We are a symbol of the women all over Latin America who risk our own safety by confronting the authorities of our governments and demanding the release of our disappeared loved ones or the acknowledgement of their deaths. May we always be persistent for justice.

**Song:** "You Have Struck a Rock" by Carolyn McDade

You have touched a woman. Ah! You have struck a rock,  
You have touched a woman, you've struck a rock,  
Oh—, Oh—,  
You have touched a woman, you have struck a rock,  
Oh, touch a woman you strike a rock.

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**Four Daughters:** One wise, one bitter, one simple, and one who doesn't even know how to ask. They question their mothers.

Mother, asks the clever daughter,  
who are our mothers?  
Who are our ancestors?  
What is our history?  
Give us our name. Name our genealogy.

Mother, asks the wicked daughter,  
if I learn my history,  
will I not be angry?  
Will I not be bitter as Miriam  
who was deprived of her prophecy?

Mother, asks the simple daughter,  
if Miriam lies buried in the sand,  
why must we dig up those bones?  
Why must we remove her from sun and stone  
where she belongs?

The one who knows not how to question,  
she has no past,  
she can have no present,  
she can have no future  
without knowing her mother,  
without knowing her angers,  
without knowing her questions.

E.M. Broner,   
"The Song of Questions."

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**ALL:** Let us all be wise here, and full of questions.  
Everything in the Seder has meaning. Even if we  
were full of wisdom, venerable sages all, steeped  
in Torah, it would still be incumbent upon us to  
recount the exodus from Egypt and examine each  
word.

## Telling Stories

There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare-bellied. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember. You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or failing that, invent.

*Monique Wittig, Les Guerilleres.*

We take time to retell our stories around our tables. Each woman could answer these questions or your own. What of your story do you want to retell on this night as we remember our journey from oppression to liberation? What is a springtime freedom that you wish for or are experiencing?

**Song:** "You have touched a woman. Ah! You have touched a rock. . . ."



**Plagues:** The biblical plagues played a necessary part in the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. But today, women have still not completely escaped the bonds of slavery. We name the plagues of our enslavement.

*(Two women announce the plagues alternately.)*

*Pour a drop of wine into your plate as the plagues are listed.*

1. We are plagued by the consistently male image of God.
2. We are plagued by the absence of women as clergy, scholars, and decision-makers.
3. We are plagued by the unequal, inaccurate, and often totally absent recording of women's history and literature.
4. We are plagued by the sexist language and content of almost all of our prayers and blessings.

5. We are plagued by our repressive religious laws and the exclusion of women from full participation in both the Jewish and Christian traditions.

6. We are plagued by an unequal pay scale for women working professionally in both the Jewish and Christian establishments, who are neither paid as much as our male counterparts nor promoted as readily to executive, decision-making positions.

7. We are plagued by the denigration of our bodies and souls as dirty, sinful, and inferior.

8. We are plagued by the devaluation of our womanhood after our child-bearing years are over.

9. We are plagued by the prison created by the traditional views of women and men, casting each into rigid roles that neither fit us as we are nor encourage the development of our individual potentials.

10. We are plagued by the chains of racism, classism, heterosexism, and ageism that bind our sisters everywhere.



*Lift the second cup of wine and say before drinking:*

**ALL:** From these plagues upon our lives we seek redemption.

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Rachatz** (*ra - chotz'*, second washing of hands)

From the moment of conception, we are bathed in water. Water is essential for creation and for our survival. It is a scarce resource. It is used for cleansing and for healing. As Jewish and Christian women we claim a new baptism, a new birth—a baptism into a community that acknowledges that it is sexist, racist, heterosexist, classist; a rebirth into a community of believers willing to struggle toward more just relationships.

We reclaim our healing powers and remember that our bodies are holy.

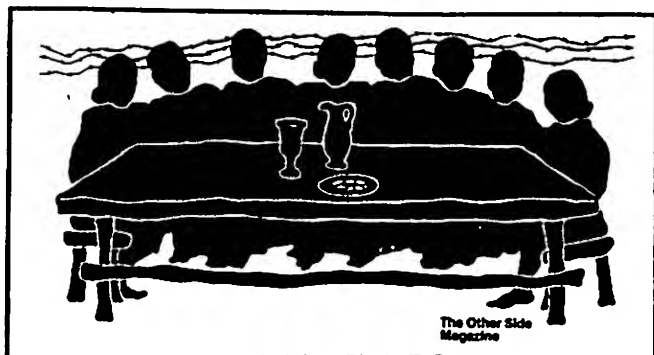
© *Water Blessing from the Ritual Meal at Women Church Speaks, 1983, Chicago.*

**ALL (while washing):** Blessed are you, Holy One, who has sanctified us with your commandments and blessed us with water.

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Motzi Matzah** (*mō - tzee' ma - tzah'*, blessing over eating the matzah)

We begin this shared meal as we begin all shared meals: by breaking bread together. Because this is the feast of unleavened bread, tonight we break matzah together.



**ALL:** Blessed are you, Holy One, who brings forth bread from the earth, and who has sanctified us through your commandments and instructed us to eat unleavened bread.

*(Eat this unleavened bread.)*

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Maror** (*ma - ror'*, eating the bitter herbs)

The maror, or bitter herbs, burns our mouths to remind us of the bitterness of slavery. The commandment to eat maror has traditionally been sweetened by dipping the maror into the haroset. May the haroset—a symbol of the mortar made by slaves—be a sign of the bond of sisterhood that binds us together tonight, through the bitterness of our enslavement and the sweetness of our liberation.

**ALL:** Blessed are you, Holy One, who has sanctified us through your commandments and instructed us to eat maror. The maror we eat tonight is the symbol of the oppression in women's lives. May it remind us of the deep suffering of so many women throughout the world and help us to be in solidarity with all who are in pain.

*(Eat maror dipped in haroset.)*

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Korech** (*kō - rech'*, sandwich of matzah, maror, and haroset)

*Make a sandwich of 2 small pieces of matzah, maror, and haroset.*

We observe one more tradition before we eat, in honor of Rabbi Hillel. There is a story that a Roman woman was seeking a teacher; she went to Rabbi Hillel and said to him: "Teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot and I will be your pupil." He said: "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go and learn."

Rabbi Hillel would make a sandwich of maror and haroset between 2 pieces of matzah. We do likewise.

*(Eat the Hillel sandwich.)*

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Schulchan Orech** (*shul - chan' ō - rech'*, eating the meal)

We have blessed our foods, we have remembered our history. Come, let us share in the food we have each prepared for this celebration.

**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Tzafoon** (*tza - fūn'*, eating the afikomen)

At the end of the meal, we break the afikomen into pieces so that we may all partake. This is a sign that what is broken shall be made whole, and that what is shattered will be restored. Our hope is ourselves, to find what is lost, to bring together what is broken, to restore our faith.



**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Barech** (*ba - rech'*, grace after the meal)

*(This blessing is prayed spontaneously by one participant. It expresses the thanks of those gathered.)*

Then, we bless the third cup of wine.

**ALL:** Blessed are you, Holy One, who creates the fruit of the vine.



**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Hallel** (*ha - lel'*, psalms of praise)

Praise our choices, sisters, for each doorway  
open to us was taken by squads of fighting  
women who paid years of trouble and struggle,  
who paid their wombs, their sleep, their lives  
that we might walk through these gates upright.  
Doorways are sacred to women for we  
are the doorways of life and we must choose  
what comes in and what goes out. Freedom  
is our real abundance.

*Marge Piercy, "Sabbath of Mutual Respect," The Moon is Always Female.*

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We now raise the fourth cup of wine, to praise our bodies as the  
handiwork and blessing of God.

**ALL:** Blessed be the wine, the symbol of the regenera-  
tive blood that flows cyclically from us and re-  
minds us each lunar month anew of our creative  
essence and power.



**Song:** Order of the Seder

**Nirtzah** (nēr - tzah', closing portion of the Seder)

Our Passover Seder is now concluding. Next year, may we celebrate our Seder in a world at peace, a world strengthened by sisterhood and supported by freedom.

**ALL:** We have done as those before us  
have done.

**We have studied Torah.**

**We have laughed and wept.**

**We have wandered in the wilderness.**

**We have begun to reclaim our past.**

**We have fulfilled the words of the Haggadah.**

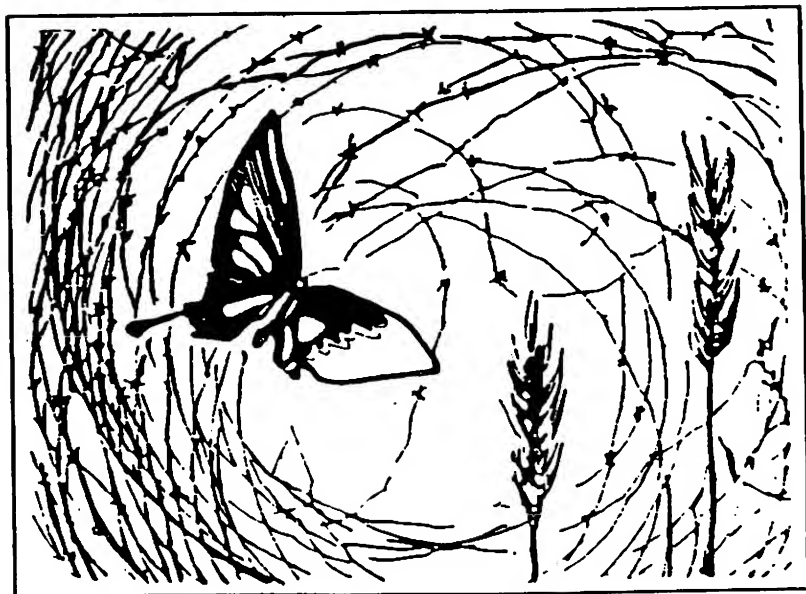
**"Each one of us must see herself  
as if she personally has left Egypt."**

**And in so doing  
we have done what no one else  
could do for us.**

**This year, we are still exiled.**

**Next year, may we be free.**

**Song:** "We are comin' out of exile. . . .  
Sister, come and take my hand. . . ."

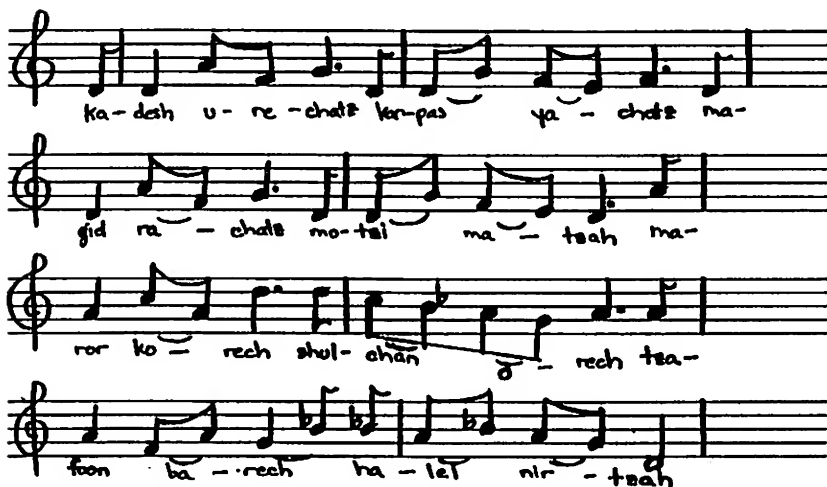


## Appendix I: Music

Songs used during the "Seder of the Sisters of Sarah" are listed here in the order in which they are used in the service. You can order a tape of Carolyn McDade's songs from: Woman-center at Plainville, 76 Everett Skinner Rd., Plainville, MA 02762.

1. Seder Order Song
2. "Coming Out Of Exile" by Carolyn McDade
3. "You Have Struck A Rock" by Carolyn McDade.

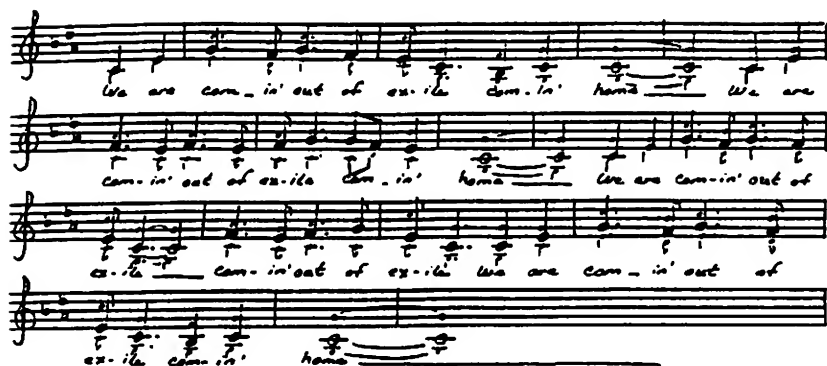
### Seder Order Song



# "Coming Out Of Exile"

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we are comin' out of exile, comin' home  
we are comin' out of exile, comin' home  
we are comin' out of exile, comin' out of  
exile  
we are comin' out of exile, comin' home

out of wilderness we come, comin' home...

sister, come and take my hand, comin' home...

all together we come, comin' home...

# "You Have Struck A Rock"

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This song was inspired by the South African women resisting the pass system of the apartheid government of that nation in the mid-1950's. They took for their motto these words: You have touched a woman, you have struck a rock. To honor the courage, energy, and vision of these women, I wrote this song, using the names of four of the women who helped to organize that resistance movement. To honor women globally in movements of liberation I use other names. Other names can be used. Participants can spontaneously add others.

*Freely, strongly*  
*Modérato*

you have touched a woman oh you have struck a rock - You have touched a woman, you have struck a rock oh touch a woman you strike a rock - Lillian Joseph - You have struck a rock He - len Do - ra Ta - ma - na You have struck a rock Fran - ces Beard oh you have struck a rock Touch a woman you strike a rock

You have touched a woman, you have struck a rock  
You have touched a woman, struck a rock  
You have touched a woman, you have struck a rock  
Touch a woman, strike a rock!

(From South Africa):

Lillian Nygoyi - you have struck a rock  
Helen Joseph - you have struck a rock  
Dora Tamana - you have struck a rock  
Francis Beard - you have struck a rock  
Touch a woman, you strike a rock

(From Nicaragua):

Doris Tierjino  
Lesbia Lopez  
Monica Baltodano  
Dora Maria Telles  
Touch a woman, you strike a rock

From United States:

Rosa Parks  
Theresa Kane  
Sonia Johnson  
Angela Davis

(Four religious women killed in El Salvador):

Ita Ford  
Maura Clark  
Dorothy Kazel  
Jean Donovan

We're the women of the Philippines  
We're the women of Vietnam  
We're the women of Namibia  
We're from the Middle East

We're the women of Guatemala  
We're the women of Grenada  
We're the women of Chile  
We're the women of El Salvador

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